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The  
Brentons  
by  
Ora Williams



OUR GOAL IS THE ATTAINMENT  
OF EXCELLENCE

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## BRENTONS

Random Notes from Recollection and Records inspired by the Brenton Centennial at Dallas Center Oct. 14, 1953 by Ora Williams.

1917265

William H. Brenton, who laid the corner stone for the Brenton Banking institution, was barely of age when he heard the call of the President of the United States for men to help save the Union. This was early in 1861. Abraham Lincoln had been in office only a few days. The flag of his country had been fired upon and dishonored. He wanted men to retrieve Fortress Monroe and punish the rebels. He asked from Iowa only a sufficient number of men to make up two or three regiments. They were to enlist for only ninety days, for it was thought the war would be over quickly. The First Iowa Infantry and the Second Iowa Infantry were organized at almost the same time. There were men offered sufficient for more regiments; but inasmuch as the immediate danger was at or near Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis, where a slavery governor threatened to seize the arms and ammunition stored there, the first companies accepted for ~~military~~ service were located on or near the Mississippi river. In fact, they were put aboard steamships and sent down the river within a few weeks, and some of them got into action almost without any field training.

The young farm boy of Dallas County rolled his few belongings into a ~~small~~ bundle and trudged off to the nearest recruiting point and on May 4, 1861 he found himself enrolled as a member of Company D, Second Iowa Infantry. He was mustered on the 27th of the month and the company started off. Landing at St. Louis the company was given weapons and these were found to be defective. The American flag did not need any armed defenders for a number of years and the army had no factory for the making of guns. The government at Washington bought guns anywhere at any price, and among those sent to Jefferson barracks were a shipment of Prussian muskets. They evidently had been rejected, for some of them burst as soon as fired. There was a fuss, of course, and better guns came from Washington.

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Random Notes from Washington and Records furnished by the President  
 Confidential at Dallas Center Oct. 11, 1953 by  
 One William.

1917262

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Mr. Brenton, the Dallas County farm boy who must have had a long walk to the recruiting place, came into contact with or associated with, some men notable in Iowa history. ~~He~~<sup>He</sup> fell into the brigade commanded by Samuel R. Curtis, of Keokuk. He had some training at West Point and was member of Congress. An officer of the brigade at one time was Gen. Marcellus M. Crocker, able Des Moines lawyer and the man of whom Gen. Grant said in after years: "He was fit to command an independent army." Then Gen. James M. Tuttle was attached to the Second Iowa, and Noah W. Mills and Gen. James B. Weaver. A private in this regiment won fame for seizing the flag that had fallen from three color sergeants and carrying it over the ramparts at Donelson. This was Voltaire P. Twombly, afterwards treasurer of state.

The regiment went on through the battles at Shiloh and beyond and into Atlanta; and being of short time men became separated and parts of other regiments.

Private Brenton was with his company only <sup>a few</sup> ~~three~~ months. At the Battle of Fort Donelson he was wounded in the hand so that he was ordered on furlough This was February 15, 1862. Then he was "disc harged for promotion" August 31, 1862. There were many others injured or killed at Donelson, on the Tennessee river; but it was here that Gen. Grant ~~turn~~ turned the tide and swept on to Vicksburg.

Did Mr. Brenton, with a wounded hand, go back to the plow on the Brenton farm on Hickory Creek and forget about the flag? O, no; he found more to do. Most of the Dallas county boys were going elsewhere to join the army, but somebody got an order that a Battery of Artillery should be organized in Dallas and surrounding counties. Mr. Brenton soon found himself whooping it u p for the Union and advising the boys to get into the Battery. The recruiting place was Adel, one of only two or three towns in the county. One of the first to sign his name to the roll was Archibald Brenton, brother of William H. There was a lawyer







in the county seat, Joseph R. Reed, who had some military knowledge. He had come to the county and taught school in the Miller schoolhouse near which the county had been organized in 1847. Then he got into the practice of law with ~~W. S. M. Abbott~~, after a brief excursion into journalism as editor of the "Ship of State". Joe was elected to be first lieutenant of the Battery. Nelson A Spoor of Council Bluffs was ~~was~~ appointed captain, but when he was promoted, Joe Reed became leader of the company. He was afterwards chief justice of the supreme court of Iowa and then served long on the United States Court of Claims. Later Reed was promoted and John W. Coon<sup>s</sup>, later county recorder of Dallas county, became head of the battery. Capt. Reed reported on an important engagement at Nashville and later at Mobile and New Orleans.

The military order for this battery directed recruitment for ~~Dalh~~ Dallas, Polk, <sup>H</sup>arrison, Fremont and Pottawattmie counties, but ~~man~~ there were members from other counties. The majority of the members, however, were from Dallas county, doubtless owing in part to the efforts of Wm. H. Brenton. Dallas county had fifty-five members. Among others whose names became well known in the county were Caswell and Clement Ferguson, John T. Kinnick, Benj F. Camery, Stephen Allenbaugh, Edward Conger, William Eckles, John W. Mattox, Sam J. Noel, Israel B. Slate, ~~Thomas~~ Thomas J. Sloane, George Fish. Jerome B. Frush, Jacob M Graham, Wm. J. Leaming, Wm. Leverton, Robert H. Moffatt, William A. Russell, B<sup>e</sup>j, Wisner and John Snyder. These are only a few of the men of Dallas county in that Battery.

Little wonder that on every Fourth of July, when the celebration was at Adel, John Snyder and Arch Brenton woke the town up by firing at dawn one of the field guns they brought back. And Wm. Brenton joined in the applause.







Hickory was once a place in Dallas County. It is not on the maps now. It never rose to the dignity of being a town, nor a postoffice; but it did get into the laws of Iowa as "a place." Dallas county was ~~133~~ located and named before Iowa got statehood. The latter event occurred just at the close of the year 1846. A newly elected General Assembly was already making law before the president signed the resolution declaring Iowa to be the 27th state. Early the next year a bill was passed authorizing the organization of Dallas county, and that bill said that the organizing sheriff and his assistants were to "meet at Hickory" and hold the election to choose first officers. They went to the county to do the organizing. But where was Hickory? Nobody could tell, or ~~man~~ would not say; so they met at <sup>the</sup> Schoolhouse near where Wilson Miller had a farm. There is a ~~shat~~ of granite in the school yard reciting the fact and date of organization.

But Hickory was a reality. There is on the maps of today a small stream <sup>mi</sup> ~~drain~~ <sup>A</sup> land just west of Dallas Center and running into the North Raccoon river east of Adel; and it is marked Hickory Creek. Now when James B. Brenton, and his band of adventurers, came first to the county a hundred years ago somebody told them about the fine land on ~~th~~ at creek, and Dr. J. B. Brenton settled on some land on Hickory Creek. The place, or settlement, or whatever it might be, was called Hickory. Of course there were earlier settlers at Hickory, for the county was organized nearly seven years before the Brenton hegira. It is quite likely that William H., as a boy, learned <sup>how</sup> ~~how~~ to drive a straight furrow or to feed a young calf.

The doctor in due time found that the county seat, first named Penough or Penach, would be a better place from which to practice his profession, So he went to what is now Adel and built a modest house on Main street two blocks west of the court square.







The war came to an end and William H. turned to the cornfields and the feed lots, having acquired a nice farm a few miles north of Hickory. He new a good steer when he saw one, and he prospered. Soon after the war came the extension of the Des Moines Valley railroad from Keokuk, and the Des Moines & Ft. Dodge lo cated a town right at the edge of the Brenton farm. The proposed future court house square was just across the street. Sure the county seat could not always remain in a town without a ralroad. XDallas Center was the right place. Lawyers, doctors, newspaper men came to be in on the ground floor. Sam. G. Sloane started a lively newspaper. Agitation for removal of the county court h house soon followed. The matter got to a vote, but failed. Later it was tried again but too late, for Adel had a railroad, or sometning they called a railroad. The deciding factor in the last round for the court house is reputed to be the politicians of the Milwaukee railroad. That company had acquired the old narrow guage through Adel and was not desirous of killing off that town. The same railroad palso had a division point at Perry. It is said that the Perry railroad men, who had a big bunch of votes, were tipped off to vote againt removal, which seems quite likely. At any rate, Dallas Center never got the

There was wholesome hospitality and much good cheer in the home of Wm. H. Brenton, in Dallas Center. He was interested in education. He induced the school authorities to fetch to the town school a very able instructor. When the news got around about the Kate Shelley incident at the bridge near Moingona, together they invited Kate to come to Dallas Center. The shrinking young girl, who had suddenly become a state herorine, had not had opportunity for good schooling. Mr. Brenton and the Dallas Center professor would start her on the way to better reading and writing. To start off the movement and interest others, a date was set and an "open house" reception for Kate was held in the home of Mr. Brenton. Friends came from far and wide to meet Kate Shelley and to help in the good work. She did get the school work needed so that she became a teacher and this was almost entirely due to the effort of Wm. H. Brenton and his friends.







The Orton circus was distinctly a Dallas County institution. Hiram Orton bought a farm near where the station of Ortonville was long after established. He bought it of my father, Ephraim Williams, who had "entered" it from the government lands. He made that farm his headquarters for a long while, and quite likely it is still used by the Ortons of later date. Orton also had a lumber yard. He was a public spirited man and he gave a "benefit" exhibition of his show in Adel and gave all the proceeds to establish a town library. I pored over some of the Orton library books when I was in Adel high school. <sup>*High School benefit for the Masonic Lodge.*</sup> His son Miles, was justly famous as a bareback rider and for years owned his own show. I have a personal memento that is witness to the quality of Hiram Orton. One April day when he was just ready to start his show season in Adel Uncle Hiram mounted a drygoods box and held up a piece of paper.

"I have just received word," he said, "that the President of the United States was shot by a rebel last night and died this morning. There will be no show today. Call at the box office and get your money back."

My father had brought the whole Williams family to see the show and I was youngest of the tribe. He had brought us from the farm sitting on the fresh straw in a wagon box drawn by Buck and Berry, the faithful old oxen. With the money he went to the picture shop operated by Mrs. Hattie Sloane, and there had pictures taken of all. "Aunt Het" was a real artist and I still have the beautiful daguerreotype taken of myself the day that President Lincoln died.

While on this subject another episode may well be told. In my school days in Adel I well knew one "Doc" Gilkeson, who lived not far from the Brenton home. "Doc" had been a clown in the Orton show and was quite a wit. In the Dallas County Gazette of Sept. 7, 1866 appeared this communication from him.







"NOT DEAD--it having been currently reported here and elsewhere, that I had taken sick whilst traveling with Orton Bro's circus in

Michigan, that I had left the company and went to Mansfield, Ohio, and there had kicked the bucket, went dead and was no more, which report was erroneous and which I know not so. When I heard it, It is true I left the company at Niles, Mich. and went to Ohio, had a very severe spell of sickness for several weeks but with the aid of medical skill, and the best of care, I was enabled to overtake the company, and return with the ~~company~~ to this place (Adel) their winter quarters and my health much improved.

Dr. J. A. Gilkeson."

Gilkeson retired and was succeeded by Al Fields, famous for many years in vaudeville. Fields, Niles Orton and Charles Shafer used to have reunions in Des Moines. Shafer had been the man in the circus who held up a pole on which a gymnast did tricks, and he became a Des Moines policeman. As before stated, the winter practice barn for the Ortons was near the Brenton home and the families were always friendly.

It was with this show that James M. Brenton traveled for a time as an athlete, doing the ~~acrobatic~~ <sup>gymnastic</sup> act from a spring board. The flip in the air of his nearly 300 pounds weight always created a sensation.

James M. was the member of the family who had a rough and ready colorful career. In our town lyceum where Herr Myers first found out he could be an actor on the stage, Jim ran the show for a long while, until Frank, Sweeley and myself teamed up on him and took over. Jim and I, for a time, courted the same girl, a schoolmate of both of us, but she married one better than either of us. Capt. James Dilley, county superintendent of schools, got a letter from school authorities at Sydney, Nebraska, saying they had a school nobody could control and they sought one who might try. Capt. Dilley sent Jim Brenton to Sydney. In a letter to me at the time he told of his experience. Sydney was out on the edge of "the plains" and the boys that came to school were a tough lot. Jim said that after the first day he lined the boys all up in a row and had them pass his desk. He asked each one to lay his pistol or bowie knife on the teacher's







desk, which they did, under promise that the weapon would be returned after school. The program was carried <sup>on</sup> each day for several days and then the boys from the cow ranches stopped bringing their guns to school. The school was finished without disturbance. Later, Jim went to Des Moines and became superintendent of the Polk county schools. But before this he had been for several years principal of the school at Wauke. One of his pupils told me long after that she regarded Jim as the best teacher she ever knew--not much on arithmetic but strong on good citizenship.

One day in 1901, Daniel W. Wooden, attorney of Des Moines, who had long been in Adel, came to me with the statement that Jim Brenton contemplated becoming a candidate for mayor. We were both from Adel and ~~at~~ had long known the Brentons, and after talking it over we agreed to give a hand to Jim and boost him for mayor. I had been a warm friend of John MacVicar, sr., but I could not turn down an old friend from Adel. He was elected mayor, and made a good one. It was during his time that President Theodore Roosevelt visited Des Moines and there was a parade. Teddy was a husky man with the tan of his North Dakota ranch; but he rode in a carriage with Mayor Brenton, who towered over him in physical bulk and shared the <sup>p</sup> applause. Jim was good for a free fight, a baseball game or a political rally.

Mention was made above to the baseball greatness of Dallas ~~co~~ county in the early heyday of that noble game. Jim Brenton was the star catcher of the Adel "Look Out" club. Many of the members had been in the old Orton circus traing barn near the Brenton home and had become athletic and versatile. About 1870 the club was thoroughly organized and adopted the new rules which gave the ~~pintha~~ battery a better ~~man~~ control of the game and stopped the endless running. A harness maker named ~~Banin~~ Bingham was pitcher and under the old rules of low delivery he was good. When waist line pitching was permitted, George Miller got into the







game. J. W. Russell, long time in the title abstract business, was second <sup>base</sup> and captain. Lee Garoutte, who had played with the Cincinnati "Reds" became an alternate catcher. Others recalled were Dave Marsh, F. J. McMullen, W. A. Tudor, L. E. Patty, Charles Crawford, Ed Grimm, ~~an~~ Charles McMullen, H. J. Swealey and Will Brockway. It was this team that brought back from a state tournament in uskaloosa as a trophy a rosewood bat and a silver ball, which for years adorned the wall in the front ~~and~~ office of the Russell Abstract company.

There were others of the family. Archibald Brenton ran the drug store in Adel owned by himself and his father, later went to Lohrville, Iowa. He was one of the Second Iowa Battery.

Dr. Thomas Brenton went to Sac City. He was son of Dr. James E., and read the books in the latter's office. It was "Dr. Tom" who long afterwards told me how that he and the senior doctor saved the life of my father. ~~Dr~~ Tom was not then in the practice but did some traveling for his father. As he was driving past the Warrington mill, some distance north of Adel, he saw my father, Ephraim Williams, fall with a part of the building he was tearing down. He picked up the injured man and found that his neck was broken, a real fracture of the bones of the vertebra. He knew enough about doctoring to know what to do to revive him, took him in his carriage to our farm, where the senior doctor followed up and brought my father to a condition of fair health.

A daughter of Dr. Brenton married a man named Nichols and they had a fine family, well known in Adel before they went to South Dakota.

Allie Brenton was a woman of sterling worth. She taught school. She induced me to sign ~~an~~ <sup>a</sup> temperance pledge. She helped organize ~~a~~ <sup>a Blue</sup> Ribbon club. She taught in normal institutes. She married late and became Mrs. Allie Harpel. She kept the books of an ice business that was owned by herself and Jim, her brother. She was a superior woman







There was a time, perhaps just once, when Dr. J. B. Brenton and his son, Wm. B. Brenton, found their interests clashing and each went his own way. Soon after completion of the Rock Island road and the Fort Dodge road, and the platting of Dallas Center and other towns, there was agitation for removal of the county seat. The platlers of Dallas Center nixed it with that in view. The Adel people got scared. They realized that if they did not get a railroad pretty soon the court house would go elsewhere. Court officials did not like to be <sup>hauled</sup> ~~hauled~~ over mud roads to the place of the court. Redfield was also interested. It was the largest town in the county. A meeting of Adel and Redfield was held in Adel Aug. 5, 1872 to plan to fight for retention of the county seat. Dr. Brenton was one of the leaders. Later a railroad company was organized, in 1875, and a railroad was actually built.

It was a narrow gauge, seven miles long, to Kaukas. In 1878 the first train ran. It consisted of a dinky nine engine, two or three open cars. The first train ran from Adel to Kaukas. Sam Ward, the blacksmith, was engineer, and Tom Denton, livery barn man, was conductor. There was no turn-table at Kaukas, so that train backed to Adel, or rather to a point across the Jackson river near Adel. I, with other boys, sat on the flat car that was head of the train as it was backed to Adel and we let our legs hang over the front. Out on the prairie a rabbit sat on the track. He had never seen anything like it before and waited until we got close to him before moving. Then he ran down the track some distance and waited for us to catch up.

The officers of that company, the Des Moines, Adel and Western, ~~was~~ were: T. H. Foster, president; J. B. Brenton, vice president; J. M. Landis, secretary; J. W. Russell, treasurer. Not until a year later was the river crossed into Adel. But the county seat was saved.



The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the study of the history of the United States. It is argued that a knowledge of the past is essential for a full understanding of the present. The author then goes on to discuss the various factors which have shaped the development of the United States, including the influence of the British, the Spanish, and the French. He also discusses the role of the American people in the creation of the nation. The second part of the paper is a detailed account of the life of George Washington, from his early years to his death. The author describes Washington's military and political career, and his role in the founding of the United States. The third part of the paper is a discussion of the American Revolution, and the role of the Continental Congress. The author discusses the various battles and events which led to the independence of the United States. The fourth part of the paper is a discussion of the early years of the United States, from the signing of the Declaration of Independence to the end of the Revolutionary War. The author discusses the various challenges which the new nation faced, and the role of the first President, George Washington. The fifth part of the paper is a discussion of the American people, and their role in the creation of the nation. The author discusses the various factors which have shaped the American character, and the role of the American people in the development of the United States. The sixth part of the paper is a discussion of the American government, and the role of the various branches. The author discusses the various powers and responsibilities of the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches, and the role of the people in the election of their representatives. The seventh part of the paper is a discussion of the American economy, and the role of the various industries. The author discusses the various factors which have shaped the American economy, and the role of the American people in the development of the United States. The eighth part of the paper is a discussion of the American culture, and the role of the various arts and sciences. The author discusses the various factors which have shaped the American culture, and the role of the American people in the development of the United States. The ninth part of the paper is a discussion of the American foreign policy, and the role of the United States in the world. The author discusses the various factors which have shaped American foreign policy, and the role of the American people in the development of the United States. The tenth part of the paper is a discussion of the American future, and the role of the American people in the development of the United States. The author discusses the various challenges which the United States faces, and the role of the American people in the development of the United States.



~~the first celebration was held~~

Another incident has just come to mind. It was the custom to rotate among the towns in the south part of Dallas county the Fourth of July celebrations. Adel people went to DeSoto one year, and they had a lot of field games. We took Jim Brenton along. When it came to the broad jump, Jim simply lifted his 300-pounds into the air and turned a somersault, which was greeted with great applause.

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Referring to the annual celebrations, there was one in Adel, and Dallas Center and other towns attended. There was the usual firing of guns at daybreak, then a parade led by the brass band, floats with pretty girls in costume and the inevitable "ragmuffin" parade of cast-offs and clowns. The parade had just gone up Main street when there appeared, quite unexpectedly, a band of Indians on horseback, arms and legs streaked with paint, feathers flying high, whooping and yelling, as they ride slim ponies up the street. Great consternation. Women screamed and hid. Then they halt at the town pump and dismount. The Indians were a band of young men from Dallas Center, under the leadership of Sam G. Sloane, the editor of the Times. When all was quiet the day was spent happily. There is where the editor got the nickname of "Big Chief" for scaring the celebrators.

So it was that the Brentons had a part in taming the wild prairies of Dallas, marking out the trails, turning the rich black soil to the sunshine, creating a community of good citizens, prosperous farms and towns, drained the ponds of muskrat houses bordered with lady slipper flowers and bulrushes, covered the fields with fat cattle, effaced the buffalo and deer trails to the salt licks, welcomed the stages, the railroads and the automobiles, and did the duty of patriots in making this a better land.

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OF EXCELLENCE





An incident to illustrate the scrupulous honesty of the

Brentons comes to mind. I had known Charles and Clyde quite well.

I knew the wife of Charlie before he did. Once when Clyde and I were discussing the problems of life as we rested on top of the windmill tower at the railroad station in Adel we outlined each to the other his career. We followed the schedule. Many years later, Charles ~~and Clyde~~ helped me with collection of a revenue claim against the Citizens National Bank, while Homer Miller was protesting. "Pay it," he said, "no use bucking the government." The two brothers came into my office while I was in charge of the Des Moines office of the United States revenue department. They had a problem. They had suffered some losses on farm mortgages in a time of depression. They wanted to know how to handle the matter on their income tax returns, so as to do entire justice to the government and not cheat themselves. I outlined the proper procedure, which accorded with the law, and was different from what they had been advised. They took my advice and it saved them many thousands of dollars in taxes and yet fulfilled the requirements of law. In other years Charles was an influential member of the state board of education.

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